

VZCZCXRO6563

RR RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN RUEHLZ  
RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHAH #1102/01 2351249  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 221249Z AUG 08  
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1404  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2010  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4198  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1875  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2446  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2808  
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001102

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN'S MEDIA: WHAT DOES THE PRESIDENT WANT?

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Recently, President Berdimuhamedov again called for the state-controlled mass media to improve and to project Turkmenistan's image abroad and reflect the age of revival better. In addition, he has reprimanded a major figure in print media and appointed a new editor of the country's largest circulation newspaper. Neither move appears to indicate a clear direction of how he hopes to reform mass media. This and his previous calls for an improvement in state news media may have little impact until he allows for a more open media environment. END SUMMARY.

FOREIGN POLICY ROLE

¶3. (SBU) At a Cabinet of Ministers meeting on August 15, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov called for the state-controlled media to project Turkmenistan's foreign policy. He specified that the media should provide an "objective picture of the transformations taking place" in order to create a proper image of Turkmenistan abroad. He said that the government should create a special information network with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Turkmenistan's embassies all actively involved. He called on the use of all resources including the Internet. It is unclear how the Ministry of Culture which oversees most mass media and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs might coordinate this. Without much more detail than the president's words, post's media contacts did not seem to know quite what to do. One TV channel contact told the embassy that there was a large meeting on the president's directives, and "superiors told us to collect more information and report it accurately."

MAKE IT MORE INTERESTING?

¶4. (SBU) According to the president's comments at another Cabinet of Ministers meeting held August 20, "in the spirit of the new historical epoch," the country's media should better cover ongoing events domestically and be more interesting. As with previous statements on improving the media, the president spoke in broad, general terms.

TAIMOVA REPRIMANDED, BUT FOR WHAT PRECISELY?

¶5. (SBU) Until recently, Jeren Taimova had served as both the head of the Turkmen State Press Service (TDH by its Russian acronym) as

well as editor of the largest circulation state newspaper, "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 44,791). Among journalists willing to discuss Taimova's leadership style, she was known as a strict editor who cut stories significantly and tended to stamp out originality in writing, unless the writing was full of praise for President Berdimuhamedov. "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" is generally reputed to be the more timely and dynamic print medium of the two organizations. But some writers speculated that Taimova sought to force the newspaper under TDH's direct control denying it any independent action or news reporting.

¶6. (SBU) The president, during the August 15 Cabinet of Ministers meeting, relieved Taimova of her second position as the "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" editor and appointed Bekdurdy Amansaryev to fill the position. And despite Taimova's reputation for control, on August 19, a presidential order reprimanded her for "loosening control" over the TDH. No more detail was provided, and post's limited contacts were also stumped when asked to elaborate on what was meant by "loosening control."

SAME AS THE OLD BOSS?

¶7. (SBU) The newly appointed editor of "Neytralniy Turkmenistan," Bekdurdy Amansaryev, is a longtime correspondent for the paper. During the Niyazov-era, he was well known for his articles praising the Ruhnama and the Golden Age. In particular, he frequently wrote articles which attacked regime opponents, especially government officials who had fled abroad. After Niyazov's death and the beginning of reform, Amansaryev's writing seems to have gravitated toward milder topics (such as routine presidential coverage or articles about the theater).

ASHGABAT 00001102 002 OF 002

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: President Berdimuhamedov appears to be frustrated that his calls for more interesting (or previously, more creative) news media seem to have little impact. His instructions appear to lack specifics, and many in the media appear not to know how they should "improve." Simultaneously, the president directs the media to project the proper spirit of the epoch of reform and a proper image of Turkmenistan abroad. Some TV reports appear to have attempted a more poetic version of the same "Golden Age" style stories. Apparently, this is not what the president wants. One reason for the lack of change is the typical Turkmen working environment which discourages risk-taking or innovation without the highest levels of approval. In addition, as long as the media remains firmly under state-control, there is unlikely to be a dramatic change. Greater autonomy or attempting to become commercially viable may be the only ways to break state media out of its uninteresting, uncreative rut. END COMMENT.

CURRAN